

Night Songs is an interspecies engagement between the ancient music of a uniquely Australian songbird - *Cracticus nigrogularis* (the Pied Butcherbird) and contemporary human musicians.

Night Songs is a compression of geography and time; the recordings and transcriptions of the birds by Dr Hollis Taylor come from Centralia, Western Australia, and Far North Queensland. Pied Butcherbirds sing their long form songs at night in spring, and this performance shrinks a twelve-hour period into a one-hour concentrated audio-visual encounter. Jon Rose has arranged this music for eight human musicians featuring Australia's premiere new music group, Ensemble Offspring under the direction of Claire Edwardes.

Although there is video (recording a black-hooded bird at night is extremely problematic!), the performance of **Night Songs** exists to privilege the aural over the visual.

Night Songs lasts approximately one hour and can be divided up into a time line with 13 linked sections:

1. **Jessie Gap** places the bird's song in a cosmic yet very human musical context with a nod to the history of western counterpoint.
2. The video recording from **Cape Range National Park** features butcherbird group singing in the early evening. In human terms, we can relate to it as a hoquet - a musical line shared and augmented between the participants. Our musicians play a direct but simplified transcription of the birds' ensemble singing.
3. **Green Lake** is an older recording gifted to us by Jenny Beasley. When a Butcherbird song is transposed three octaves down and performed on a Bassoon, the results are quite chatty, not to say humorous.
4. **The Gap** features the songs of three birds that are within hearing distance of each other. The material has been used vertically in full ensemble chords and horizontally in counterpoint, accompanied by the calls of two frogs with in shifting polyrhythms.
5. The bird from **Temple Bar** is heard first in the original and then usurped by a flute solo utilising the same material. This bird is virtuosic, and so becomes the flute part.
6. This short video interlude sees two Pied Butcherbirds on a lamppost at **Stott Terrace**.
7. On nighttime excursions to record the birds, Hollis Taylor inadvertently documents all nighttime activity, including trucks, drunks, police impersonators, wandering cows, and dingos. Here, a cicada sits on top of the remote recording box, creating an extraordinary bass frequency. The Oboe takes the part of the bird at **The Burke and Wills Roadhouse** in FNQ. Insect boosterism arrives with a hefty interjection from other band members.

8. In video of the **Araluen 2021** bird from last year, I wanted the projected image large. Far from a cute tweet tweet new age background to make us feel good, this is a song demanding the attention of other birds and our attention, too. This was recorded between 3 and 4 am and is taken from a three-hour performance. It is partly accompanied by a harmonisation of a bird nearby at **Wintersun**.

9. It rarely rains in Alice Springs. The second freak rainfall within three months prompts **the Burke Street bird** to launch into a kaleidoscope of vocal mimicry: a budgie, a clucking hen, a honeyeater, a ring-necked parrot, a cat, a peregrine falcon, a grey shrike-thrush, and maybe a dog. Most of these calls are truncated - seemingly random editing in a DJ cut-and-paste session. No one really knows yet why some birds mimic - is it an avian Wikipedia, is it a diary, is it a test of aural memory, or are they dreaming or simply being 'other'?

10. The precise recordings of four birds at **Trephina Ridge** are realised by our virtuosic humans and mapped onto a rhythmic ground bass. Hollis calls the location of these recordings her 'music camp'. In the wild, these birds are just on the cusp of hearing range; in our performance they are heard side by side in counterpoint.

11. Short video interlude. The early morning quotidian rites of Pied Butcherbirds at **Sandstone Point** as they get ready for the day.

12. Human musicians serve as sonic punctuation in a full-on morning chorus at **Arlunga**. Each member of the chorus (avian and human) finds or competes for vertical acoustic space in which to operate - a butcherbird in their midst. This broadband cacophony may seem for many human ears as too complex to compute. But for birds whose aural fidelity and resolution is perhaps ten times sharper and more focused than ours - it all makes perfect sense.

13. In a postlude, we return to the night as the bird at **Ross River** sings (a lament?), floating above chord changes in another cosmology but connecting with our sense of musicality. As species collapse continues unabated, we offer you a reminder to support BirdLife Australia

Claire Edwardes - vibraphone, marimba, conductor

Jason Noble - clarinet and contrabass clarinet

Lamorna Nightingale - flute and piccolo

Rhys Little - trombone

Callum G'Froerer - trumpet and double trumpet

Benjamin Hoadley - bassoon

Ben Opie - oboe

Benjamin Ward - double bass

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